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ABSTRACT

To measure attitudes toward advertising program graduates versus non-advertising graduates, a study was conducted of advertising managers nationwide and advertising agency middle managers in New York, California, Illinois and Texas. Two hundred and eighty-three self-administered questionnaires were completed. Results included the following findings: (1) there was a significant difference of opinion between sample populations, with advertisers ranking college advertising program graduates significantly higher than advertising agency middle managers; (2) the more entry level personnel advertisers interviewed, the more negative their attitudes toward the perceived abilities of advertising graduates; and (3) in agencies, the longer the respondent's experience, the higher the skills rating. (Five tables of data and 34 notes are included.) (SR)

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Advertisers and Advertising Agencies: A National Survey of Current Attitudes Toward Advertising Graduates

by

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March 30, 1989

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Abstract

A survey was conducted of advertising managers nationwide and advertising agency middle managers in New York, California, Illinois and Texas. The self-administered questionnaire measured practitioner attitudes toward advertising program graduates versus non-advertising graduates.

A significant difference of opinion was noted between sample populations. Advertisers ranked college advertising program graduates significantly higher than advertising agency middle managers.

The number of entry level personnel interviewed was the most significant advertiser correlate; the greater the number interviewed, the lower the skills ratings.

For the agency sample, the longer the respondent's experience in the industry, the higher the skills ratings.

The Problem

As early as 1927, Claude Hopkins was "exasperated" because advertising courses were "so misleading, so impractical."[1] Carl Ally, a founder of Ally and Gargano, among the nation's fifty largest advertising agencies, claimed that he "learned from real professionals instead of PhD hacks who knew nothing."[2] In *Ogilvy On Advertising*, the author supposed that "with a few conspicuous exceptions, the teachers of advertising lack the professional experience to be relevant."[3] One scholar summarized published practitioner attitudes toward advertising graduates by stating that:

> The historical record clearly suggests that advertisers have typically believed that advertising majors are insufficiently trained in the skills necessary to secure an entry level position... As a result, advertising majors have always been little more than members of a large labor pool for the business.[4]

How accurate is this conclusion? How typical are the statements cited by industry leaders of these and other times?

The following work specifically addresses the question of the perceived worth of a degree in advertising by industry professionals.

Students have cast their proxy vote by enrolling in advertising programs in record numbers. The number of advertising majors has more than doubled in the past twelve years.[5] Increased student enrollments seem to indicate an increase in the perceived worth of an advertising major. If this is so, what are the ramifications of increasingly larger numbers of graduates searching for an unknown number of entry level positions if the following comment solicited by the study represents a prevailing view?

> Undergraduate and graduate schools are turning out individuals who have academic approaches to advertising and marketing. Having hired many grads during my tenure at Top 10 agencies, I found that... none have been capable of making immediate contributions to justify their salaries.
>
> President, small Chicago advertising agency.

Consider that the number of advertising graduates increased by 82.3 percent between 1973 and 1979. During the same four year period, the total number of employees for all advertising agencies surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics increased a modest 29.2 percent. Nothing is known about the ratio of advertising versus non-advertising graduates hired.

Data about advertisers are extremely limited. Nearly a decade ago, Sid Bernstein speculated that there was a fifteen-to-one ratio of non-agency to agency employees in the marketing communications industry.[6] However, the absolute number of jobs, rate of growth and advertising versus non-advertising graduates hired ratios outside the agency field have not been published by the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, nor any private group. In 1980 John Wright concluded that "there is a real need for a definitive study to determine the entry level job potential existing within the advertising industry." Nearly ten years later, no such study has been published. Compiled facts about advertisers appear to be in limited supply. Indeed, despite the fact that advertisers outnumber advertising agencies by more than four to one, 17,000 versus 4,000,[7] a review of articles, theses and other research published during the past twenty years found commentary on advertising education long on agency views and short on advertiser opinion.

A Literature Review

The published research on practitioner attitudes toward advertising education and graduates divides into three sub-themes:

professionals who prefer to hire or have a positive view of advertising graduates[8,9,10,11,12];

practitioners who prefer a liberal arts background[13];

and practitioners with unfavorable, even hostile opinions of advertising or allied professional education.[14,15,16,17,18]

The study of advertising agency executives' attitudes by Gifford and Maggard[19] supported the generalizability of comments by Hopkins, Ally and Ogilvy earlier. In this 1973 study, seventy percent of respondents "expressed the opinion that a serious gap exists between the needs of advertising agencies and the expertise which students bring to their initial jobs." The researchers polled presidents of 4A's agencies throughout the United States. The assumption was apparently made that agency senior executives were in a position to judge the work of entry level employees. The authors of the study did not extrapolate their findings to the agency middle managers who generally hire and supervise entry level personnel.

In 1974 William A. Cather, then president of a Manhattan-based advertising agency conducted the first comparative study of attitudes toward graduates among agencies *and* advertisers.[20] Cather observed significant differences supported by the results of the study outlined later in this paper. He noted that only eleven percent of agency senior executives versus twenty-five percent of advertising managers agreed that advertising and marketing education provided an "excellent background for the real world of advertising." Eleven percent of agency managers felt such courses were "a waste of time"; a feeling shared by only five percent of advertising managers.

The Cather study made the same assumptions about the relationship of agency presidents to entry level personnel as Gifford and Maggard. Until now, no attempt was made to survey the attitudes of agency middle managers vis-a-vis their corporate middle management alter ego, the advertising manager.

Thesis and dissertation writers, soon to enter the job market, have also explored the attitudes of potential employers. A review of the abstracts, theses and dissertations written since 1962 on some aspect of advertising education finds that only four have been concerned with the skills criteria or attitudes of advertising or public relations firms' executives.[21]

In 1963, Keith Ryan surveyed 149 advertising agency managers nationwide. Twenty-six percent rated college advertising programs as "good" or "excellent". Thirty-five percent rated them as fair and nineteen percent rated them "poor" or "totally inadequate".[22]

A decade later, Max Wilson surveyed 198 advertising agencies as follow up to Ryan's earlier work.[23] Now twenty-two percent of agency presidents rated advertising programs as "good" or "excellent", thirty-seven percent rated them "fair", and twenty-six percent rated them "poor" or "totally inadequate" reflecting a significant increase in negative responses.

In a small qualitative study of Florida agency presidents, Michael Frost concluded that "advertising practitioners have diverse views which often run contrary to the feelings of advertising educators."[24]

More recently Grotchen Schmitt concluded from her survey that advertising programs were "not generally viewed....as the best sources of employees." Other findings noted that the agency segment viewed advertising programs as "mediocre" and as not having "improved significantly over the years."[25]

The apparent disdain which the advertising industry, specifically advertising agencies, exhibit may be part of a larger phenomenon. Studies in the closely related fields of marketing[26], and newspaper and magazine journalism[27,28,29] illustrate a similar hostility toward professional education and its graduates.

The one study in the field of public relations hints at one of the few bright spots in a somewhat gloomy portrait. In a 1981 survey limited to professionals in southern California, Beverly Cooper uncovered a favorable disposition toward public relations education programs.

Given the great increase in the number of advertising graduates, a new practitioner attitude study appeared necessary for the following reasons.

1. A national study of both advertising agent and advertiser opinion had not been completed since Cather's 1974 survey.

2. The most comprehensive research on agency opinion was completed in 1973.[30]

3. A number of more recent studies[31,32,33] utilized limited geography and sample sizes.

4. The opinions of agency or client middle level managers who perform most entry level hiring had never been surveyed.

Objectives

The study was conducted to obtain data that might provide answers to the following research questions.

1. Do professionals believe advertising graduates bring more knowledge and skills about the discipline to entry level positions than other college graduates?

2. Is there a significant difference of opinion between client and agent?

3. Do a professional's years of experience, amount and type of post secondary education, and age correlate significantly with his or her opinions of advertising graduates?

4. Do one or several of these variables serve as predictors of attitudes?

5. How do the survey samples rate their experience with advertising program graduates?

6. Were there any significant differences in the experiences of advertisers versus agencies?

7. Were there any significant differences in the attitudes of those who had hired graduates and those who had not?

Survey Dimensions

Entry level personnel may be hired for specific positions; for example, junior copywriter or copywriter trainee, production assistant or assistant account executive. Individuals interviewed for entry level positions tend to be judged on the basis of conventional guidelines, educational background, work experience, personal interests, achievements and of course personality.[34]

The study assumed that advertising graduates constituted a representative sample of all college students, that the primary factor distinguishing advertising graduates from all others was educational background. If advertising education was the dimension under scrutiny, what then were the indicators? What advertising knowledge and skills, if any, would a practitioner expect from entry level applicants?

Questionnaire Construction and Pre-tests

A series of knowledge and skills statements were developed and then pre-tested to establish face validity. The first pre-test was conducted among members of a

professional advertising club in a small southeastern city. A second pre-test among a small group of advertising professionals located in the northeast revealed that a number of scale problems had not been solved. A third revised questionnaire was then pre-tested using an ordinal, five-point Likert-type scale to rate each skill or knowledge statement among a systematic random sample of 100 advertisers nationwide and 100 advertising agencies. At total of sixty-one responses were received. Based upon the return data and comments made by the respondents, the decision was made to mail the final version of the questionnaires to agency middle managers rather than agency senior executives. A mailing would also be made to randomly selected advertising managers nationwide.

In the final version of the survey questionnaire, respondents were asked.

"*When compared with other college graduates seeking entry-level positions, advertising graduates are:*

*Much less able*_____|_____|_____|_____|_____ *Much more able*

to perform the stated skill.

The pre-tests had produced a series of twenty skills statements covering all areas of advertising except art direction. It was assumed that entry level art directors or graphic artists would be selected from the ranks of commercial art or graphics programs.

The following statements were considered general management skills statements:

monitor project or campaign budgets,

write timely conference reports,

develop an agenda for a client-agency meeting,

monitor supplier progress and expedite jobs,

judge the fairness and accuracy of supplier invoices.

The governing hypothesis was that these skills were not specific to advertising education so that an advertising graduate would not be rated more highly than non-advertising program graduates.

The next group of skills statements were considered advertising specific:

assume the duties of an assistant advertising manager,

compile market research data,

analyze audit statements and ratings,

proof mechanicals or camera-ready art,

write collateral or sales promotion copy,

interpret the results of a direct mail test mailing,

write a valid market research questionnaire,

know the advantages and limitations of print and broadcast media,

select the most efficient copy and layout from alternatives,

focus and guide an art director's efforts,

produce a radio spot for a local client,

write a marketing communications plan,

monitor a dealer sales promotion program.

Sample Populations

Mailing lists were purchased from the National Register Publishing Company, publisher of the *Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies* and *Standard Directory of Advertisers*. The list compiler generated two random samples: directors of advertising by name and agency middle managers by name and title. A total of 160 advertiser and 123 agency questionnaires were completed.

A conservative approach was adopted for statistical analysis. Positive skewness values indicated a nonnormal distribution in which the data were skewed to the left of

the mean in both samples. Nonparametric methods were used exclusively. Whereas there are valid methods for superimposing normal distributions, these techniques were not employed given the availability of robust nonparametric analyses.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table One

Variable	Advertiser	Agency
Mean age	43.2	42.8
Mean years of experience	19.1	17.8
Percentage with college degree	86.4	86.4
Percentage with advanced degree	16.0	22.4
Degree type (highest awarded):		
Advertising	17.3	18.4
Business	18.5	28.8
Engineering/Science	1.2	2.4
Fine Art	8.6	5.6
Journalism	15.4	9.6
Liberal Arts	15.4	20.0
Mass Communication	7.4	5.6
Other	4.3	1.6
Not Specified	11.7	8.0
Title:		
President	--	20.8
Vice President	8.0	40.8
Director	34.0	11.2
Supervisor	.6	15.2
Manager	45.7	8.0
Executive/Coordinator	4.9	3.2
Assistant	4.3	.8
Other	1.2	--

Table One Continued

Class:		
Manufacturer	51.9	na
Service	26.6	
Retail	4.9	
Distribution	1.9	
Publisher	13.9	
Agency Function:		
Account Management	na	39.7
Creative Services		10.9
Media		13.4
Production Management		14.3

The questionnaires appeared to reach their target in the advertiser sample. The agency results were confounded by the widespread use of "Vice President" in this segment of the industry where it often serves as an honorary title. Whereas they are seldom officers of the corporation or partners of the firm, most advertising agency vice presidents are simply middle managers.

Table Two

Annual Sales or Billings:		
Less than $5 million	6.2	26.0
$5 to $19 million	8.9	29.3
$20 to $100 million	34.9	26.8
$101 to $500 million	23.3	8.1
Over $500 million	26.7	9.8

The annual sales or billings shown highlights the fact that most advertising agencies are essentially small businesses.

Entry Level Personnel Interviewed and Hired

In the twelve months prior to the completion of the survey, advertisers had interviewed 1,003 individuals for 217 positions, a 4.6 to 1 ratio. The advertising agency sample interviewed 1,886 individuals for 257 positions, a 7.3 to ratio.

A substantial percentage of advertisers, 40.9 percent, had hired no entry level personnel in the twelve months preceding the survey; April, 1985 to April, 1986. A smaller number, 25.2 percent of advertising agencies had not hired entry level personnel.

Survey Results

1. Do industry practitioners believe advertising graduates bring more advertising knowledge and skills to entry levels positions than other college graduates?

2. Is there a significant difference of opinion between advertisers and agencies?

A median score of 3.5 or greater was interpreted as a positive response, that is advertising graduates were "more able" to perform the specified tasks than their non-advertising colleagues.

For the five general management skills statements, no median scores 3.5 or greater were observed in both sample populations. Both advertiser and advertising agency agreed that an advertising major did not develop superior skills regarding matters of monitoring budgets and suppliers, writing reports, developing meeting agendas, and judging invoice fairness and accuracy.

Ten median scores of 3.5 or greater were observed for advertising specific skills in the advertiser sample. Two additional scores of 3.47 were noted. Clearly advertisers believed that advertising graduates possessed more skills than their non-advertising colleagues in ten or thirteen areas.

The advertising agency scenario appeared quite different. Only four scores 3.5 or above were observed

The following table lists rankings of advertising specific skills for both sample populations.

Table Three

Statement Short Form	Seg	Much Less Able	Less Able	Same	More Able	Much More Able
Become assistant advertising manger	Adv	2.5	6.3	21.9	51.3	18.1
	Agy	1.6	7.4	32.8	46.7	11.5
Compile published market research data	Adv	4.4	23.3	34.6	32.1	5.7
	Agy	1.7	17.5	45.0	25.0	10.8
Analyze media audit statements and ratings	Adv	3.8	7.0	23.4	50.0	15.8
	Agy	1.7	6.7	33.6	44.5	13.4
Proof mechanicals or camera-ready art	Adv	3.7	6.9	36.2	39.4	13.7
	Agy	4.9	8.1	48.8	27.6	10.6
Write collateral copy	Adv	6.3	17.0	23.3	42.1	11.3
	Agy	3.3	14.6	43.1	29.3	9.8
Monitor project or campaign budgets	Adv	1.9	13.1	50.6	30.6	3.7
	Agy	2.5	13.3	45.8	32.5	5.8
Interpret results of direct mail test	Adv	3.8	6.3	32.7	49.1	8.2
	Agy	.8	13.1	51.6	27.0	7.4
Write a valid market research questionnaire	Adv	3.7	13.7	30.0	41.9	10.6
	Agy	3.3	11.5	40.2	33.6	11.5
Know print and broadcast media	Adv	7.5	10.0	11.9	43.1	27.5
	Agy	6.5	12.2	22.0	38.2	21.1
Select best copy and layout	Adv	6.3	11.2	23.8	43.8	15.0
	Agy	1.6	13.8	39.0	35.8	9.8
Write timely conference reports	Adv	1.2	12.5	56.3	26.9	3.1
	Agy	.8	5.7	70.5	21.3	1.6
Develop agency for client-ag. acy meeting	Adv	2.5	9.4	39.0	43.4	5.7
	Agy	3.3	8.1	58.5	26.0	4.1

Table Three Continued

Statement Short Form	Seg	Much Less Able	Less Able	Same	More Able	Much More Able
Focus and guide art director	Adv	6.3	9.4	26.9	45.0	12.5
	Agy	8.2	9.8	45.1	25.4	11.5
Monitor suppliers	Adv	1.9	7.5	62.3	23.9	4.4
	Agy	1.6	4.9	73.8	16.4	3.3
Produce radio spot for local client	Adv	2.5	12.7	13.4	50.3	21.0
	Agy	5.7	12.3	32.0	37.7	12.3
Write marketing communications plan	Adv	5.6	18.1	16.2	48.7	11.2
	Agy	5.0	19.0	28.1	38.8	9.1
Judge fairness of supplier invoices	Adv	1.9	6.9	66.9	21.9	2.5
	Agy	4.1	6.6	75.4	12.3	1.6
Monitor dealer sales promotion programs	Adv	.6	8.9	41.8	44.3	4.4
	Agy	3.3	13.2	50.4	28.9	4.1

To ascertain if there were any statistically significant differences of opinion between the two sample populations, the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxin test was applied.

Of the twenty statements employed in the questionnaire, significant differences were found among eight statements.

Table Four

Statement Short Form	Z score	Two-tailed p
Become assistant advertising manager	1.983	.047
Proof mechanicals/camera ready art	2.164	.030
Interpret results of direct mail test	3.132	.002
Develop agenda for client-agency meeting	2.54	.011

Table Four Continued

Statement Short Form	Z score	Two-tailed p
Focus & guide art director's efforts	2.50	.012
Produce a radio spot for local client	3.186	.001
Judge fairness of suppliers invoices	1.987	.047
Monitor dealer sales promotion programs	2.708	.007

The opinions of advertisers and agencies differed significantly on eight skills statements, six of which were advertising specific. Advertisers exhibited significantly more confidence in the ability of advertising graduates to assumes the duties of assistant advertising manager, scrutinize supplier invoices and proof mechanicals than their agency counterparts. Differences were most acute regarding radio production skills and direct mail tests.

3. Do a professional's age, years of experience, amount and type of post secondary education correlate significantly with his or her opinions of advertising graduates?

4. Do one or several of these variables serve as predictors of attitudes?

Age

Among advertisers there were five significant correlations. The younger the advertising manager, the more likely he felt advertising graduates could do a better job of compiling market research data than non-advertising graduates. Four positive correlations revealed that the older an advertising manager was the higher the rating of advertising graduates on the abilities to: write timely conference reports, develop

agendas for client-agency meetings, interpret results of a direct mail test, and analyze media audits and ratings.

Age was a more potent indicator among agency respondents. The older the agency manager, the more positive his view of advertising graduates. Positive correlations were noted for nine skills statements regarding the abilities to become: an assistant advertising manager, write copy, monitor budgets, interpret direct mail tests, know print or broadcast media, select the best copy, write timely conference reports, work with art directors, and monitor suppliers.

Experience

One would expect a strong linear relationship between age and experience. However there were no significant correlations between an advertiser's years of experience and any of the skills statements.

The agency sample performed more as expected. With the exception of writing timely conference reports and interpreting direct mail tests, the experience and age correlates were identical.

Education

Among advertisers there was only one significant correlation with education. The conclusion appears to be that a college or advanced degree does not appear to flavor an advertisers attitude towards entry level candidates. The same conclusion was reached for the agency sample.

5 How do the survey samples rate their experience with advertising program graduates?

6. Were there any significant differences in the experiences of advertisers versus agencies?

The questionnaire concluded with a question asking the respondent to rate his or her experience with new hire advertising graduates along a seven-point scale

ranging from 1 "Terrible" to 7 "Delighted". The following table condenses the results into a readable format:

Table Five

Rating	Advertisers (n = 68)	Agencies (n = 72)
Terrible	--	--
Unhappy	--	1.4
Mostly dissatisfied	1.5	2.8
Mixed	17.6	18.1
Mostly satisfied	32.4	37.5
Pleased	39.7	34.7
Delighted	8.8	5.6

A Mann-Whitney test concluded there was no statistical difference between the rank means of advertisers and agencies.

Among advertisers there were no significant correlation between experience with newly hired advertising graduates and the skills statements.

Among agencies there were eight significant correlations. A more positive experience with newly hired advertising graduates translated into higher estimations of graduates abilities in proofing mechanicals, monitoring projects, interpreting direct mail tests, knowledge of the media, ability to select the best copy and to monitor dealer sales promotion programs.

7. Were there any significant differences in the attitudes of those who had hired graduates and those who had not?

A Kolmorgorov-Smirnov Two-Sample test was used to compare the goodness of fit of the distributions of those who had recently hired and those who had not recently hired advertising graduates. It was concluded that there were no significant difference of attitude between those who had and those who had not hired advertising graduates.

Summary and Conclusion

Unlike earlier advertising agency studies which focused on agency presidents and other senior executives, an attempt was made to survey the middle manager. This action was based on the assumption that entry level personnel are interviewed and hired by account executives, account supervisors, media and production managers rather than presidents and senior vice presidents.

Generally the results appear consistent with earlier research. Although client and agent agree that advertising graduates are no different than non-advertising graduates in general business skills, there is major disagreement regarding specific advertising skills. The difference of opinion between advertiser and agency noted in Cathor's 1974 study reappears. Advertisers still rank advertising graduates significantly higher than their agency alter egos. Agency middle managers appear to share the negative bias of their superiors noted in Gifford and Maggard's 1973 survey.

The more entry level personnel interviewed by advertisers, the more negative their attitudes toward the perceived abilities of advertising graduates. This might be explained by higher corporate standards, less attractive entry level positions, or more "fussy" interviewers. The number of entry level personnel interviewed was the strongest correlate of advertiser attitude.

There appeared to be no significant difference of attitude between those who had hired advertising graduates and those who had not. The lack of any difference was remarkable.

As expected, respondents tended to use the area reserved for comments to express problems, not strengths. More than 150 respondents took the time to offer comments ranging in length from a few words to full-page letters.

"Strength -- students get a lot of theory.

Problem -- students get a lot of theory."

Media Director
New York Barter Agency

This interesting quip summarizes, in Big Apple fashion, many of the comments expressed by the respondents to the mail survey. Perhaps a way of restating the Media Director's comment would be that students should be taught theory but that perhaps they are being taught too much theory. However, the now clichéd "too much theory" objection was not the most often mentioned problem of advertising education. This school took a back seat to a larger chorus calling for practical experience through the use of internships.

None of the respondents' comments could be construed as overly caustic or vindictive. A number of practitioners complained that advertising programs had graduated too many prima donnas with unrealistic expectations of the industry and assessments of their own talents. Others noted that advertising programs over-emphasized big budget consumer advertising, that business-to-business advertising, print media sales, and other specialties were ignored by the academic community. Additional comments centered around a lack of knowledge of print production techniques, that there was an overemphasis on the electronic media.

On the positive side, advertising education was cited for providing a "focus". Many respondents seemed impressed by graduates' knowledge of media, particularly the broadcast media. Graduates were also regarded as creative with a knowledge of "good design".

Perhaps most heartening which noted that advertising graduates were "much better than they used to be" and that the advertising industry itself had become "more professional".

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